

Ali & Ripley (1983) describe its food as "carrion, offal and garbage and to a large extent human ordure. Occasionally takes frogs and large crickets on grasslands; in one case, *Brachytrypes achatimus* (Masan & Lefroy). Also winged termites emerging from the ground (C. F. Fischer).

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Hence this behaviour of the scavenger vulture feeding on a dead nestling of white-backed vulture on the latter's nest is worth recording.

I am grateful to Dr. V. S. Vijayan for his encouragement.

VIBHU PRAKASH

REFERENCE

ALI, SALIM & RIPLEY, DILLON (1983): Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan — Compact edition. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

10. SOME OBSERVATIONS ON UNUSUAL FEEDING BEHAVIOUR
OF WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN (*AMAURORNIS*
PHOENICURUS)

The feeding behaviour of the White breasted Waterhen, one of the common monsoon visitors to Point Calimere (10°18'N, 79°51'E) was observed for seven days from Feb. 21-27, 1985 continuously in a small water pool found near the forest department quarters. Observations were made through one of the windows of the quarters, since the water pool was close to it. The drying water pool was partially covered by a small *Prosopis* tree (*Prosopis juliflora*) which was the regular roosting place for the bird during the observation period. Active feeding was observed late in the evening before the bird went for roosting. It fed mainly on shrimp and small fishes. It used to enter the water for catching fish and shrimp even up to the depth where the water used

to touch its belly. Whenever it caught any shrimp, it crushed the prey between the mandibles before swallowing it. Occasionally it caught a small catfish of 3-4 cm. After catching the fish, the bird would hurry back to the land and many times I saw it dismembering the prey with the clear intention of dislodging the poisonous spines of the fish. Dismembered fish used to be brought again to the water for removal of sand particles. The fish was cleaned by holding it in the beak, then dipping it into the water and vigorously shaking it. On two occasions the poisonous spines of the catfish were collected by me after the bird had left the place. After the pool dried up, the bird changed its roosting place and was not seen again near the quarters.

According to Ali & Ripley (1969) the food of the White breasted Waterhen is insects and their larvae, molluscs, worms, seeds and shoots

of marsh plants. I think small fish and shrimp should be included in the diet of this bird.

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REFERENCE

ALI, S. & RIPLEY, S. D. (1969): Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan. Vol. 2. Oxford University Press, Bombay.

11. FORAGING-RELATED CHANGE IN FOREHEAD COLOUR IN KENTISH PLOVER (*CHARADRIUS ALEXANDRINUS*)

A solitary Kentish Plover in winter plumage observed at Kihim beach (Raigad District) on 30 August, 1986 revealed a behaviour pattern that may be adaptive for greater efficiency in capturing prey. It was seen that the extent of white on the birds' forehead, affected by the sudden erection of feathers on that part, increased abruptly when the bird stopped to collect a morsel while foraging. The 'normal' extent of white on the forehead while the bird is at rest, or moving about in a non-feeding activity is restricted to a thin line just above the bill which extends backwards to meet the fore-edge of the eyes and more apparent in specimens is "continued unbroken as backwards as supercilium" (IND. HB. 2: 235). While engaged in foraging, the bird takes several mincing steps, often running in a zig-zag pattern; in doing this, it suddenly brakes to a stop to either 'collect' an insect on the sand surface or to probe the sand for a worm. It is at this stage, just a fraction of a second before it stops, that the feathers on the forehead are erected, revealing a large flash of pure white which extends up to the fore-crown. Once or twice in a sequence of

seven or eight such observations between 0740 and 0755 hrs., the upper edge of the white band appeared to be mottled with brown.

The plover was the only visible bird on the beach, except for a brief visit of one Brahminy Kite and two Pariah Kites (*Haliastur indus* and *Milvus migrans*) skimming over the Casuarina treetops c. 100 metres away. All the observations, made from 12-15 metres away with 10×40 binoculars, involved the bird directly or obliquely facing the sun which was just clearing the top of the Casuarina trees. The bird was feeding at the water's edge in an incoming tide, and was facing downwind in all the observations, which rules out the possibility of the feathers being ruffled by the wind.

This behaviour may be analogous to the 'open-wing' (? wing-flashing) foraging pattern of several heron species (Ardeidae), wherein they create a shadow on the water's surface, thus attracting fish to the surface. It is however not clear how a sudden flash of white on the plover's forehead could make a worm or insect more vulnerable. One explanation suggested by Carl D'Souza, bird artist, is the possibility of the white patch having a reflec-